

AN
ACCOUNT *7 1/2 £*
OF THE
PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION *1170*
OF *3.*
ELIZ. WOODCOCK,
WHO SURVIVED A CONFINEMENT
UNDER THE SNOW,
OF NEARLY EIGHT DAYS AND NIGHTS.

In the Month of FEBRUARY 1799.

IN TWO PARTS.

By *THOMAS VERNEY OKES, Surgeon.*

“ From the bellowing East,
In this dire Season, oft the Whirlwind's wing
Sweeps up the burthen of whole Wintry Plains
At one wide waft;” and now fatigued, and stiff
With cold, the hapless Wand'rer in his way
“ The billowy Tempest whelms.”

THOMSON'S WINTER, 268, &c. London, 1779.

Cambridge,

Printed by F. HODSON.

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THE attention of the Public would not have been solicited to a subject, that has already nearly exhausted their curiosity, had it not appeared to me desirable, that they should be furnished on such an occasion with as correct a statement of facts as possible. Upon so surprising a circumstance, as a person's being found alive after being shut up above a week in a Snow-Drift, it was to be expected that reports would be circulated tending rather to feed the impatience of enquiry, than supply precise and accurate information. This has been very much the case, and more than one publication has already appeared. I have therefore been favoured by the Rev. Mr. Holme, Minister of the parish to which this unfortunate woman belongs, with a particular detail of the circumstances relating to this singular, though not unparalleled, event. These circumstances have been carefully collected by him from various interviews and conversations,

which he has had with the *subject* of the following narration, and from very many particular inquiries which he has made of every person concerned in any part of this transaction. And as no incident, of the smallest importance, has been overlooked or omitted, that could in any respect serve to illustrate the situation and feelings of this unfortunate woman, from the first moment of her sufferings to the present time, the Public, it is hoped, may now be considered as in possession of an account sufficiently minute and authentic.

Elizabeth Woodcock, aged 42 years, went on horseback from Impington to Cambridge, on Saturday, being market day, the 2d of February, 1799. On her return home in the evening, between six and seven o'clock, being about half a mile from her own house, her horse started at a sudden light,* which proceeded most probably from a Meteor, a phænomenon, which, at this season of the year, not unfrequently happens. She

- * “ Seen thro’ the turbid fluctuating air,
- “ The stars obtuse emit a shiver’d ray;
- “ Or frequent seem to shoot athwart the gloom,
- “ And long behind them trail the whitening blaze.”

Thomson’s Winter, line 126, &c. London, 1779.

was herself struck with the light, and exclaimed, "Good God! what can this be!" It was a very inclement stormy night, a bleak wind blew boisterously from the N. E. The ground was covered by the great quantities of snow that had fallen during the day, yet it was not spread uniformly over the surface. The deepest ditches were many of them completely filled up, whilst in the open fields, away from the trees and hedges, there was but a thin covering; but in the roads and lanes, and many narrow and inclosed parts, it had accumulated to a considerable depth: no where yet so as to render the ways impassable, but still enough to retard and impede the traveller. The horse, upon his starting, ran backward, and approached to the brink of a ditch, which the poor woman recollected; and fearing lest the animal in his fright should plunge into it, very prudently dismounted with all expedition. Her intention was to walk, and lead the horse home, but he started again and broke from her. She repeated her attempt to take hold of the bridle; but the horse, still under the impression of fear, turned suddenly out of the road, and directed his steps to the right, over the open common field. She followed him in hopes of quickly overtaking him, but unfortunately she lost one

of her shoes in the snow: she was already wearied with the exertion she had made, and besides had a heavy basket on her arm, containing several articles of domestic consumption, which she had brought from market. By these means her pursuit of the horse was greatly impeded; she however persisted, and followed him through an opening in a hedge, a little beyond which she overtook him, (about a quarter of a mile from the place where she alighted) and, taking hold of the bridle, made another attempt to lead him home. But she had not re-traced her steps farther than a thicket, which lies contiguous to the said hedge,* when she found herself so much fatigued and exhausted, her hands and feet, particularly her left foot, which was without a shoe, so very much benumbed, that she was unable to proceed farther. Sitting down then upon the ground in this state, and letting go the bridle, "Tinker," she said, calling the horse by his name, "I am too much tired to go any farther, you must go home without me;" and exclaimed, "Lord have mercy upon me; what will become

* Parallel to a part of this hedge, and contiguous to it, is a small thicket of black and white thorn, which having been cut down a few years ago were now grown up to the height of about five feet.

of me!" The ground on which she sat was upon a level with the common field, close under the thicket on the south west. She well knew the situation of it, and what was its distance from and bearing with respect to her own house. There was then but a small quantity of snow drifted near her, but it was beginning to accumulate, and did actually accumulate so rapidly, that when Chesterton bell rang at 8 o'clock she was completely enclosed and hemmed in by it. The depth of the snow in which she was enveloped was about six feet in a perpendicular direction, over her head between two and three.

This is the second stage of this tragical event: her imprisonment was now complete, for she was incapable of making any effectual attempt to extricate herself, and in addition to her fatigue and cold, her clothes were stiffened by the frost: resigning herself therefore calmly to the necessity of her sad situation, she sat awaiting the dawn of the following day. To the best of her recollection she slept very little during the first night, or indeed any of the succeeding nights or days, except on Friday the 8th. Early the next morning she distinctly heard the ringing of a bell at one of the villages at a small distance. Her mind was

now turned (as it was most natural) to the thoughts of her preservation, and busied itself in concerting expedients, by means of which any one who chanced to come near the place might discover her. On the morning of the 3d, the first after her imprisonment, observing before her a circular hole* in the snow, about two feet in length and half a foot in diameter, running obliquely upwards through the mass, she broke off a branch of the bush, which was close to her, and with it thrust her handkerchief through the hole, and hung it, as a signal of distress, upon one of the uppermost twigs that remained uncovered: an expedient which will be shewn in the sequel to have occasioned her discovery.

She bethought herself, at the same time, that the change of the moon was near; and having an almanack in her pocket, she took it out, though with great difficulty, and consulting it, found

*The poor woman says that the extremity of this hole was closed up with a thin covering of snow or ice, on the first morning, which easily transmitted the light. When she put out her handkerchief she broke it, and in consequence of which, the external air being admitted, she felt herself very cold. On the second morning it was again closed up in a similar manner, and continued so 'till the third day, after which time it remained open.

that there would be a new moon the next day, February 4th. The difficulty which she found in getting the almanack out of her pocket, arose in a great measure from the stiffness of her frozen clothes before mentioned. The trouble however was compensated by the consolation, which the prospect of so near a change in her favour afforded. She makes no scruple to say, that she perfectly distinguished the alternations of day and night; heard the bells of her own, and some of the neighbouring villages, several different times, particularly that of Chesterton,* was sensible of the living scene around her, frequently noticing the sound of carriages upon the road, the natural cries of animals, such as the bleating of sheep and lambs and the barking of dogs. One day she overheard a conversation carried on by two gypsies, relative to an ass which they had lost. She afterwards specified, it was not their asses in general terms, that they were talking about, but some particular one, and her precision in this respect has been confirmed by

* Chesterton bell rings every night at 8 o'clock and 4 in the morning, during the winter-half of the year, Sundays excepted.

the acknowledgement of the gypsies themselves. She recollects having pulled out her snuff-box and taken two pinches of snuff; but, what is very strange, she felt so little gratification from it, that she never repeated it. A common observer would have imagined the irritation arising from the snuff would have been peculiarly grateful to her, and that being deprived of all other comforts, she would have solaced herself with those which the box afforded, 'till the contents of it were exhausted. Possibly however the cold she endured might have so far blunted her powers of sensation, that the snuff no longer retained its stimulus. At another time finding her left hand beginning to swell in consequence of her reclining for a considerable time on that arm, she took two rings, the tokens of her nuptial vows twice pledged, from her finger, and put them together with a little money, which she had in her pocket, into a small box; sensibly judging, that should she not be found alive, the rings and money, being thus deposited, were less likely to be overlooked by the discoverers of her breathless corpse. She frequently shouted out, in hopes that her vociferations reaching the ears of any that chanced to pass that way, they might be drawn to the

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spot where she was. But the snow so far prevented the transmission of her voice, that no one heard her. The gypsies, who passed nearer to her than any other persons, were not sensible of any sound proceeding from her snow-formed cavern, though she particularly endeavoured to attract their attention.

The picture, which her fancy presented to her, of the distress which her loss would occasion to her family, consisting of her husband and four children, and one of those a suckling (two years and a half old) at the breast, very frequently recurred. It was however too painful to dwell upon; and lest she should be overwhelmed with grief, she had recourse to heaven for comfort, and poured out her soul in fervent supplication to that Being, of whom it is said with equal pathos and truth, that "He shall deliver the poor when he crieth, the needy also, and him that hath no helper." Psalm 72. v. 12. It was a very curious and surprising circumstance, that the sensation of hunger ceased almost entirely after the first day. Thirst indeed was throughout her predominant feeling, which happily for her she had the most plentiful means of allaying, by sucking the surrounding snow. In some measure indeed snow

may be considered, to a person in her situation, as meat and drink; she was compelled to use it for both, and no doubt it contributed to her sustentation and the prolongation of her life. As to the time of her confinement, it appears, by a circumstance to be mentioned in the history of her liberation, that she was perfectly apprized of its duration: but she says it did not appear upon the whole so tediously long as might, in all reason, have been expected; except towards the last, when it seemed to pass more slowly than before. When the period of her seclusion approached to a termination, and a thaw took place on the Friday after the commencement of her misfortunes, she felt uncommonly faint and languid; her clothes were wet quite through by the melted snow; the aperture before mentioned became considerably enlarged, and tempted her to make an effort to release herself; but, alas! it was a vain attempt: her strength was too much impaired; her feet and legs were no longer obedient to her will; and her clothes were become very much heavier by the water which they had imbibed. And now, for the first time, she began to despair of ever being discovered or taken out alive; and declares, that all things considered, she could not have survived a continuation of her

sufferings for the space of twenty-four hours longer. It was now that the morning of her emancipation was arrived, her sufferings increased, she sat with one of her hands spread over her face, and fetched the deepest sighs, her breath was short and difficult, and symptoms of approaching dissolution became every hour more alarming. And here let the reader pause a moment, to contemplate the deplorable condition of this poor woman in this comfortless and apparently desperate situation. Relief, if it did not come soon, she knew would come too late. She saw no prospect of its arrival. Her schemes for attracting the observation of any accidental passenger had hitherto proved abortive; she feared that they would not now succeed. It is at this instant that the circumstance which effected her liberation appears singular and wonderful. To those who really believe in the interposition of Providence in the arrangement of human events, and much more to such as are convinced of his perpetual agency in every incident that befalls his creatures, it will be thought by no means improper to apply the epithet Providential to her preservation in this critical juncture, when all human aid seemed to be withdrawn, and death to menace the acceleration of his final blow.

It will form, however, the third division of this eventful story to describe the particulars of that happy alleviation of her sorrows, her discovery, and liberation. On Sunday the 10th of February, a young farmer, whose name is Joseph Muncey, in his way home from Cambridge, about half past twelve o'clock, crossed over the open field, and passed very near the spot where the woman was. A coloured handkerchief, hanging upon the tops of the twigs, where it was before said she had suspended it, caught his eye: he walked up to the place, and espied an opening in the snow. It was the very aperture which led to the prisoner's apartment.* He heard a sound issue from it, similar to that of a person breathing hard and with difficulty. He looked in, and saw a female figure, whom he recognized at once to be the identical woman who had been so long missing. He did not speak to her, but seeing another young farmer and the shepherd at a little distance, he communicated to them the discovery he had made. Upon which, though they scarcely gave any credit to his report, they went with him to the spot. The

* This apartment, as I have termed it, was sufficiently large to afford the woman space enough to move herself about three or four inches in any direction, but not to stand upright, being only about three feet and a half in height, and about two in the broadest part.

shepherd called out, "Are you there, Elizabeth Woodcock?" she replied, in a faint and feeble accent, "Dear John Stittle, I know your voice, for God's sake help me out of this place." Every effort was immediately made to comply with her request. Stittle made his way through the snow 'till he was able to reach her, she eagerly grasped his hand, and implored him not to leave her. "I have been here a long time," she observed. "Yes," answered the man, "ever since Saturday." "Aye, Saturday week," she replied. "I have heard the bells go two Sundays for church." An observation which demonstrably proves how well apprized she was of the duration of her confinement. Mr. Muncey and Mr. Merrington junior, during this conversation, were gone to the village to inform the husband, and to procure proper means for conveying her home. They quickly returned, in company with her husband, some of the neighbours, and the elder Mr. Merrington, who brought with him his horse and chaise-cart, blankets to wrap her in, and some refreshment, which he took it for granted she would stand in peculiar need of.

The snow being a little more cleared away, Mr. M. went up to her, and upon her entreaty

gave her a piece of biscuit and a small quantity of brandy, from both she found herself greatly recruited: as he took her up to put her into the chaise, the stocking of the left leg, adhering to the ground, came off. She fainted in his arms, notwithstanding he moved her with all the caution in his power. But nature was very much exhausted, and the motion, added to the impression which the sight of her husband and neighbours made upon her, was too much for her strength and spirits: the fit, however, was but of short continuance, and when she recovered, he laid her gently in his carriage, covered her well up in the blankets, and conveyed her without delay or interruption to her own house.

The reader may now wish to be informed how it is to be accounted for, that she was not found sooner, and what means were put in practice, though in vain, for her discovery. "Tinker," it will be recollected, the poor woman said to her horse, when she sat down behind the thicket, "I am too much tired to go any farther, you must go home without me." The faithful quadruped obeyed her orders, and went home without delay. Upon his coming to the gate which leads to the stable, farmer Woodcock heard him,

and went out instantly, expecting to find his wife, and to welcome her home after her cold and disagreeable journey. I shall not attempt to paint the poor man's disappointment at seeing the horse without her. He was too prudent however to lose his time in fruitless and unavailing lamentation. He deemed it much wiser to use his best endeavours to find out where she was. Accordingly he set out, with another person, taking a lantern with them, on the road leading to Cambridge. Special enquiry was made of every one whom they chanced to meet, whether they had seen or heard any thing of neighbour Woodcock; but they were not able to learn any tidings of her. Several times they shouted out her name, but no answer was made. They continued their search as far as Cambridge, when they were informed that she had left her Inn about six o'clock in the evening. Returning upon this intelligence, they explored the road afresh that night, and early the next morning renewed the painful but necessary task. They confined their search chiefly, perhaps too much, to the public road, but they could discern no trace where she might have left it, and knew not where to turn off to the right or left, or to what extent. Four days the search was continued with little or no intermission; not only by the

poor man and the person who first accompanied him, but by several others who kindly volunteered their services on this interesting occasion. But no regular search was carried on beyond the 4th day, though every neighbour had of course the thoughts of her full in his mind, and when he went out, looked about, wishing to have it in his power to announce the anxiously expected intelligence; but all was equally unavailing, and terminated alike in the frustration of their hopes. It was strongly suspected that some gypsies, who lay near the road, had robbed and murdered her. Their miserable tents were twice examined, but no vestige was there of any thing which could lead to a detection of their supposed villainy. Upon experiencing therefore nothing but reiterated disappointments, the husband had, for some time previous to her being found, resigned himself to his misfortune, and waited with all the patience he was master of until a thaw should come on, which he thought would lead to a discovery of her, wherever she might be. In common with all his neighbours and friends, he had concluded that her death was a circumstance that might be taken for an indisputable certainty. The event however shews how well he would have been employed in persisting in his search of her, and how much too

soon he despaired of her life. If the loss of a person, similar to that which we have now related, should happen within the knowledge of any into whose hands this narrative may fall, he will pursue a course of enquiry considerably different from that observed in this case. He will particularly seek for the largest accumulations of snow in the vicinity of the lost person's usual place of residence, and direct his examination, with the most careful accuracy, to any aperture which may be discerned in any part of them: on no account forgetting to scrutinize, with increased diligence, such masses as he finds collected about trees, hedges, or bushes. Had that been thought of in the present instance, it is extremely probable that this distressed female might have been spared many hours, nay days, of her solitary and wretched seclusion, and have been restored to her family with far less personal injury than she has now unhappily sustained. In case she had been found in a state of insensibility, there was still room to hope, that the vital spark, though it might exhibit no symptoms of its existence, was not yet irrecoverably extinguished. It might have been truly said, "*Forſan ſcintillula latet.*" It is a melancholy consideration, but it will ſcarcely admit of a doubt, that numbers of persons

undergoing a temporary suspension of their vital powers from cold as well as other causes, have been lost, by not having recourse to, and frequently for want of perseverance in the use of such means as would have restored them to society. The history of the numerous instances of persons who in this situation have been recovered by the gentlemen of the Humane Society, and others who have put in practice the admirable methods recommended by them, sufficiently evinces the probability of this. The bare possibility indeed of E. W.'s life being saved, even after she had been missing four or five days, ought to have prevented her husband and friends from leaving her restoration, as they did, to mere accident. Had Mr. Muncey jun. taken a different route, or not stopped, as he did, to view the hole he descried in the snow, she would probably have perished. We would, therefore, very earnestly recommend the hints which this singular case suggests to every one, who may have reason to suspect that any of his fellow creatures is in the same dreadful predicament with this woman. By due attention to them, some valuable lives may eventually be preserved to society, and to numbers to whom their loss might be irreparably severe. If even one life should owe its preservation to what has been here

observed, it will amply repay the writer for his trouble of drawing up this account. And that fortunate person, to whose lot it may fall to save from a state of impending destruction any individual of the human species, will congratulate himself upon the opportunity he enjoyed of perusing these sheets, and the use he was enabled to make of the intimations here given. This will be one useful improvement of the narration now laid before the public; and we hope every reader will strenuously and joyfully avail himself of it. Another observation, with which, I trust, it will be allowable to detain the reader, shall be relative to the surprising circumstance of the survival of a human being, for seven days and seventeen hours, with no other nourishment than what could be derived from the snow. It will be recollected, that it was said that E. W. had a basket with her, when she pursued her horse over the open field beyond Burton Hedges. But she had let it drop, through fatigue, before she had reached the spot where she sat down. She was perfectly sensible where it was, and described its situation so accurately, that in searching for it afterwards, it was found where she mentioned; but at such a distance, however, from the place where she was detained, and so inclosed and locked up, as it were, in the snow, that it was

totally out of her power to get to it, or to procure any part of its contents. It is very certain then that she owed her subsistence to no other natural means than the snow. Another reflection cannot but occur to every reader, upon the most cursory perusal of what has been said; and this respects the great danger there is of travelling late in the evening of the short days, especially in the most severe weather of the winter season. Prudence, and a regard for her own safety, ought surely to have prevented E. W. venturing from home on so bad a day. Or if she thought it absolutely necessary to go,* it would have been a much better plan to have taken some person with her, or have contrived to accompany some of her towns-people both to and from Cambridge. But without any hesitation or precautions of this kind, she set out, though of a slender, delicate make, to ride alone, two miles at least, to market, along an uneven road, on a day too, one of the most cold, snowy, and tempestuous that, perhaps, was almost ever known in this climate. On her return she was encumbered with a bushel

* “ Sive Aquilo radit terras seu bruma nivalem
 “ Interiore Diem Gyro trahit, ire necesse est.”

Hor. Sat. 6. B. 2.

of coals and a large basket, and did not set out homewards till it was so late that upon her leaving Cambridge the evening was closing fast around her. It is indeed much easier to animadvert upon the rashness and folly of any undertaking when the issue of it turns out disastrous and unfortunate, than it is to see the consequences before they have taken place. But foresight is a power which as rational creatures we possess in an eminent degree, we ought not on any account therefore to forego this honourable privilege, and act only upon the spur of present impulse. There was in this case, as in most others, a possibility if not a probability of her getting home again safe and well, and this probability was in her estimation, and would have been so in that of many others, sufficient to outweigh the prospect of all the perils which due consideration would have presented to her view. Her misfortune, however, will we hope operate as a warning to all in circumstances similar or approaching to a similarity with her's. Though we ought not at any time to feign imaginary dangers, or even regard real ones, where the object we have in view is of considerable importance; yet in the ordinary course of things, where a journey, for instance, is not of such urgent and pressing necessity as to render the procrastination

of a day or two inadmissible, we ought to weigh well the difficulties and dangers we are likely to encounter, and not rush precipitately into them. Unless such precaution be taken, it may be said, without harshness or breach of charity, that we deserve, in some degree, the misfortunes to which we are accessary by our want of discretion. It must however be observed, that during the whole time of her confinement, E. W. exercised the greatest patience and resignation, and has done the same invariably since. Let any person imagine himself in her condition, and ask himself in what manner he thinks he should have felt disposed and affected. We confess, for our own part we should have thought, that the repeated reflections of any person in such a situation, upon his own sad state, and the idea of that consternation and distress into which his family must be thrown, together with the apprehension of a slow and lingering death, without the prospect of human assistance, and the great probability, if he should be discovered, that it might be too late to preserve life, and perhaps only the means of protracting his sufferings, would have absolutely driven him to distraction. This poor woman, on the contrary, "possessed her soul in patience," dwelt little upon her own misfortune, and with

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astonishing composure commended herself to the mercy of Providence, and humbly left the disposal of the event to his wisdom. Such have been the sufferings of this poor woman, that a very general sentiment of compassion, on her behalf, has been awakened amongst all ranks of people to whom the knowledge of it has come. And it is to be hoped that this detail of her afflictions will stimulate a generous and benevolent public to contribute bountifully to the alleviation of those heavy expences, which proper attendance, independent of many other demands, must render it indispensably necessary for her to incur. The loss, too, which her family has experienced, and still experiences, in being deprived of her care, superintendence and industry, may fairly plead as another circumstance tending to render any relief which the humane may be induced to afford her, the more beneficial and acceptable.

PART II.



THE Journals of voyagers in the northern climates furnish us with but too many instances of the powerful effects of cold on the human body, and numberless ones also of life being preserved under a very short and scanty allowance of food.

Those persons likewise who are conversant in the care of lunatics have frequent opportunities of observing what intensity of cold the human frame can occasionally resist, and that the existence of man may be prolonged for a very considerable time under an almost total abstinence from every thing which, to common observers, seems necessary for its support.

A case is recorded in the 27th vol. of the Philosophical Transactions, page 266, of a woman at Chardstock in Dorsetshire, who, having remained six days covered with snow without receiving any the least nourishment, was, at the expiration of that time, taken from it alive, and suffered no other injury than the mortification of a little toe.

A Gentleman resident in Devonshire has favoured me with an account of two persons who were covered up in the snow for a much longer time and afterwards taken out of it alive; one of them, a female, who preserved herself by sucking the oil from some unwrought wool; the other a young man who was under the snow 14 days, had received no other sustenance than what he obtained from drinking some water which was near the place of his confinement; nor did he recollect that even once, during the time of that confinement, he had any sleep.

ELIZABETH WOODCOCK, whose case will be the subject of the following pages, was covered up under the snow, without taking either solid food or drink, for the space of eight days; and though this is a much shorter period than those just now mentioned, yet the history of these eight days is so accurately detailed to us and the effects of intense cold upon the human body, with the appearances of returning health, have so strongly pointed out the proper mode of treating such cases, that this publication will perhaps be found not entirely useless; even if in the *medical* treatment, nothing new should be found, it will at least be an

additional reason why, in cases of persons being thus lost, the pursuit ought never to be given up, under the idea of their having perished from being so long subject to the extreme cold of the snow which incloses them.

As Mr. Holme, who is the officiating clergyman at Impington, the parish in which E. Woodcock lives, and to whose humanity she is very greatly indebted, has given a very accurate account of her being lost, of the circumstances which happened during her confinement under the snow, and of her being at last found again, as detailed in the first part of this pamphlet, it only remains for me to relate what she has suffered in consequence of the long continued application of intense cold, absolute incapability of motion, total abstinence from food, and almost total deprivation of sleep—I say, I have only to relate these, unless indeed I may be allowed to add, that I have no doubt of the truth of all the facts collected by Mr. Holme; for I saw her almost immediately after she was taken from the snow; and I saw also the place from which she was dug, as well as her basket containing the articles she had bought at Cambridge eight

days before, and which a man told me he had dug out of the snow at some distance from the place where she had been sitting through the time of her confinement; I have seen also the dreadful effects of the cold upon her frame, and have, during a very long attendance upon her (from Feb. the 10th to April the 17th, in which interval she has been visited either by myself or my pupil near 50 times) heard her constantly repeat the same circumstances without the least variation; her own relation of them being always clear and without any art.—If her tale had been a false one, I think that in the long continuance of fever and the extreme and almost ceaseless agonies she suffered for so many weeks from the mortification of her feet, she would, at intervals, have been put off her guard; but neither myself, nor my pupil, have ever discovered any thing like falsehood in the answers given by her to our repeated questions relating to this most extraordinary event.

C A S E.

ELIZABETH WOODCOCK is now (April 17, 1799,) about 42 years of age; has been the mother of several children by her first husband; and has

also one near two years and a half old by her second husband, which she suckled at the time of her being lost; her stature is rather low, her eyes black, and her complexion fallow with a reddish tint on her cheeks; and, though she is of but a thin habit, has enjoyed, upon the whole, very good health.

I saw her first on Sunday, (Feb. the 10th,) in a cart, when her neighbours were removing her to her home soon after her being taken out of the snow.—As I had frequently been at her house before this event, she knew me instantly, and calling me by my name, spoke with a voice tolerably strong, though rather hoarse. I observed that her hands and arms were *fodden* but not very cold; nor did the state of her pulse indicate so much debility as from her situation might have been expected; but it is nevertheless possible that her pulse at this time might be quickened and strengthened by the pleasure of again seeing the sun and beholding the countenances of her surrounding friends;—her legs were cold and her feet in a great measure mortified. I directed that she should be put into bed without delay, and take small quantities of weak broth occasionally, but not so frequently as to overload the stomach—

also that she should not have any strong drink nor be brought near to any fire.

I visited her again on Monday the 11th, when she gave me a general account of what had passed during her confinement; but as many persons had come to see her, and were continually in her room, I forbore to harass her by asking any more than necessary questions.—She told me that from the time of her being lost she had eaten nothing but portions of the snow which surrounded her, and believed that she had not slept till Friday the 8th.

At various times she had made water, but not in great quantities; no evacuation from her bowels had taken place; very little milk had been in her breasts for a long time before her accident; and, whilst she was buried in the snow, there was none at all.

From the hurry of spirits occasioned by too many visitors, and from her having taken nourishing broths, &c. in greater quantities than I had directed, she seemed to have feverish symptoms coming on very fast—the pulse was rising, her face was flushed and her breathing was shorter than it ought to be.—The greatest part of both

feet I now discovered to be in a state of complete mortification, which unhappy circumstance was occasioned by their being frostbitten before she was covered with snow. Her ancles were cold and benumbed, and the integuments felt puffy; nor could I, for this reason, determine precisely the extent of the mortification. I ordered that her feet might be wrapped up in linen cloths wetted with brandy, and that this application should be frequently renewed; her lips and tongue, I found, had suffered very much from the cold and were very sore. I found also, that though she had made water since she returned home, she had experienced no other evacuation. Medicines were now administered to keep off the fever; and in the evening she took some opium. I gave a strict charge for her being kept quiet, and requested that she might be fed only with very weak broth.

Tuesday the 12th.—Great numbers of people had been and were then pouring into the house to visit and talk with her; which circumstance adding much to the natural effects of returning warmth in her habit, produced so violent a fever that I began to have but little hopes of her recovery;—her pulse was now quick and full; her

breathing was short and laborious; her face and neck were of a deep red colour; her skin was hot and dry, her tongue parched; and she complained of an excessive pain in her body and head. She had no sleep in the night, and could not take nourishment of any kind.

I directed a clyster of mutton broth to be administered immediately; some saline mixture with antimonial wine to be given to her at proper intervals; and a dose of opium at night. I ordered moreover that she should take some strong decoction of bark as soon as the clyster had operated, and the heat and fever began to abate. Very large vesications were formed on her feet, and from the puffy feel and coldness of the integuments above the ancles, I suspected that the mortification had reached to those parts also.

Wednesday the 13th.—The clyster having produced a very large evacuation of hardened fæces, and the pain of her body being immediately relieved and the fever being also very much gone off, the bark was given to her in large quantities as often as her stomach would bear it, and one grain of opium thrice in the day. I opened the vesications on the feet and continued the use of the brandy as at first.

Thursday the 14th.—She was extremely weak and low, and her voice, from hoarseness and debility, could scarcely be heard; the fatigue she underwent in seeing company and answering the enquiries of those persons whom curiosity had drawn to her house, and her being able to take but little nourishment, made me almost despair of her recovery. I persuaded her to drink some port wine which Mr. Holme was so good as to send her; but the soreness of her mouth caused her to take it with great unwillingness. The bark happily agreed very well with her, and the opium seemed to produce the best possible effects; I therefore desired that she would take a pill of one grain, at any time when she was in pain or even restless. Her body being uneasy I ordered a clyster of mutton broth to be given, and the feet to be wrapped up in warm cataplasms of stale beer and oatmeal.

In the evening the pain of her body increasing and the first clyster not coming away I directed a second to be administered and a mixture of oil and manna to be taken occasionally.—I ordered also the opium to be continued.

Friday morning the 15th.—Being very low and weak she could not change her posture in bed

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without the assistance of two persons; one of whom was employed in moving her body, and the other had the care of shifting her feet; which becoming very sore appeared also to be heavy and unwieldy. No evacuation of her body had taken place since Tuesday, and she had made no water for forty-eight hours, so that she was in great pain. Her pulse was now very languid, her voice weak, and every other symptom of general debility but too apparent. I advised her to take the port wine more frequently, and to have another clyster.— The feet, however, notwithstanding the other symptoms of extreme weakness, looked better than I expected; the mortified parts began to crack at the edges, and I could see how far up the limb the mortification would extend, though I could not determine the depth of it. It appeared, however, that the cold had extended its violent effects from the end of the toes to the middle of the instep, including more than an inch above the heels and all the bottoms of the feet, for thus far had the mortification extended. The smell of her feet now became extremely offensive, though the nurses had, by changing the poultices thrice in the day, lessened it as much as possible. The patient said, the only comfort she experienced was from the pills, and the renewal of very hot

poultices; these were made with stale beer and oatmeal boiled together. For the last two days she complained very much of cold ("inward cold" she called it) and wine, though taken very hot, rum and water, and an additional quantity of blankets did not seem to remove it. Opium was now administered in doses of two grains thrice in the day.

Friday Evening.—The clysters having produced two or three evacuations, had made her very low, indeed it was with great difficulty she could be kept from fainting as she lay in the bed; but having at my request taken some sago with wine and a few spoonfuls of a cordial mixture now and then, with the usual dose of opium, she had more sleep than could have been expected.

Saturday 16th.—She was more revived, made water freely, but with pain, and had a relaxed stool in the evening. Opium and wine were given to her as yesterday, but no bark.

Sunday 17th.—The mortified parts were extremely offensive, and I removed a large quantity of integuments which hung loose at the bottoms of her feet; she requested that the cataplasms

might be renewed *as often as possible*, and applied *very warm*, which was done three times in the day. She continued very weak and low (that is) as to bodily strength, but her mind was very calm, and she endured her pain and illness with most wonderful fortitude.

The tincture of bark was now given her as often as she could be persuaded to take Medicine, but her support was the opium, wine, and broth; of the former she took one grain and a half, three or four times in the day.

Monday 18th.—There was very little change of symptoms; the mortified parts became continually loose, and in order to lessen the stench, as much of them as was loose was removed.—The bark now became so unpleasant to her that she could not be persuaded to take it; the opium was administered as before; her bowels were in a better state than they had been, but she still complained as before of “inward cold.”

Tuesday 19th, and Wednesday 20th.—She was seized with violent diarrhoea, which occasioned great debility; a cordial mixture therefore was ordered; but she seemed to receive no benefit

from any thing but *opium*, of which she had taken two grains every three or four hours for two days and nights.

Thursday 21st, and Friday 22d.—The diarrhoea was much abated, and several toes were so loose that I easily removed them with the scissars.

Saturday 23d.—It was not thought necessary to give the doses of opium so frequently; a return of the difficulty of making water, though to no great degree, took place, but it soon went off again. I persuaded her to try to be taken out of bed for the first time, which she did, and happily was removed without fainting. From Monday 25th, to Tuesday March 14th, she continued rather to gain strength, and the sloughs to loosen in different parts. I removed all the toes, and *took away all the integuments from the bottom of one foot*, excepting a piece at the heel which was so long ere it loosened itself that I feared the Os Calcis and the Tendo Achillis had suffered, which proved to be the case. The sloughs on the other foot were thrown off more slowly, from which only the skin and two of the lesser toes had been removed.

The bark had now become so disagreeable to her that I could only persuade her to take now and then a little of the tincture in some water; of opium she took constantly a grain and a half thrice in the day.

Her bowels were in a good state, but she had not much relish as yet for meat; she however took strong broth in large quantities, and milk porridge, and drank now and then some wine and ale.

To March 14th she continued much the same; the sloughs were removed as fast as they became loose, and by the 17th all the toes of both feet came off except one great toe. I was very sorry to find, upon removing the sloughs from the heels, that the os calcis of each foot was bare in many parts; all that part of each foot where the mortification had taken place was now one exceedingly large sore, and very tender; and, from its situation, she was unable to bear removal except from the bed to the chair, and sit till the bed was made; for after she had been sitting a short time her feet became so extremely painful that she could endure no posture but an horizontal one. At the latter end of March the sores much diminished in

extent, and I took off the remaining toe. About this time she was seized with unusual sleepiness, which gave her attendants no small alarm; she slept almost constantly night and day, for three or four days, and they were scarcely able to keep her awake to take food, her pulse was very weak and low, and greater signs of debility were manifest at this period than there had been for some weeks past, but she seemed to be relieved by the use of warm and camphorated medicines; her appetite was but very small, and she was frequently troubled with pain in her body from costiveness and suppression of urine.

April 17th.—The sores were now free from sloughs, and became evidently less every day; her appetite is tolerably good, and her general health has begun to amend; but with all these circumstances in her favour, she feels herself to be very uncomfortable, and in fact her prospect is most miserable. True it is that her life is saved; but the mutilated state in which she is left, without even a chance of ever being able to attend to the duties of her family, is almost worse than death itself; for from the exposure of the os calcis in all probability it will not be till after some months that the bottoms of her feet can be covered with new skin;

and after all, whenever this event takes place, they will be so tender as not to bear any pressure; the loss too of all her toes must make it impossible for her to move herself but with the assistance of crutches.

It will probably be expected that I should say something relative to her being able to remain alive so long without sleep or food, in the uncomfortable situation which has been already described.

In the former pages it has been mentioned that I have not the smallest doubt of the accuracy of her statement of particular facts, and indeed every circumstance of this business that has come to my knowledge, confirms me in my persuasion of the truth of the whole, even that part which seems most improbable, namely, her not having slept until Friday the 8th*; and to her continuing without sleep, I think I may venture to assert the preservation of her life may more immediately be

* In the history of the young man in Devonshire, who was buried so long under the snow, it may be recollected that he said, according to his belief he did not sleep at all during the 14 days of his confinement.

attributed. Every one who has read the accounts given by travellers, of what has fallen under their notice in the more northern climates, must remember that one effect produced by intense cold is a strong propensity to sleep, which, if indulged, terminates invariably in death; but if I am not mistaken, this propensity to sleep comes not on till the actual perception of severe cold has been experienced. It is said that intense cold, by diminishing the force of the circulation through the arteries upon the surface, throws too great a quantity of blood upon the head, which is assigned by some as the cause of that drowsiness which has just now been noticed. But as Eliz. Woodcock (as she has repeatedly asserted) felt no cold either before her confinement under the snow, or indeed afterwards except in *her feet only*; may it not be concluded that as she was at all times generally warm in every other part of her frame, she by this circumstance escaped that drowsiness, the effect of which has been so remarkably destructive to those persons who have been attacked by it.

Her life seems to have been preserved too in some degree by her having had no evacuation from the bowels during eight days; she made

but very little urine during this time, and we may reasonably think that perspiration was not carried on in a very great degree. If great evacuations either by stool or urine had taken place when no food could possibly be obtained, death must have been the immediate and inevitable consequence; but as in the torpid state in which she remained there was no exertion of body which could waste the frame, life probably might have been prolonged to her for a much more extended period than that of her confinement; very little sustenance being necessary (at least for some time) to the continuation of our existence without actions.

The state of her mind throughout the whole of this very singular occurrence appears to have been well adapted to the trials she underwent; the resignation with which she sat down when her horse had left her, and her examination of the almanac when she wished to know the time of the change of the moon, are such proofs of composure as few persons would have possessed in so alarming a situation, and doubtless assisted in a very eminent degree to prevent an unnecessary waste of strength.

The facts before us seem as strong reasons for

enforcing the directions given by the Humane Society, and agreed on by all medical men, as to the treatment of persons suffering from intense cold, or long abstinence from food.

The application of heat to the human body after intense cold, is attended with the most dreadful consequences; it always produces extreme pain, and most frequently either partial* or general mortification of the parts to which the heat is applied; instead therefore of allowing patients of this description to come near a fire, let the limbs be rubbed well with snow, or if snow cannot be procured, let them be immersed into cold water, and afterwards chafed with flannel for a considerable length of time; and to diminish the force of fever (which in the case of E. W. had nearly been fatal) let the party be restrained most cautiously from taking too much or too nutritious food; spirits likewise, or wine, should on no pretence whatever be administered till they have first been copiously diluted with water.

Great attention must be paid to the state of the bowels, and in cases of having suffered long

* Of this nature are Chilblains.

abstinence from food, clysters of meat broth will be found to be in every respect of great utility.

The use of opium and camphor is much to be recommended, though perhaps it may be advisable to give the opium at first in very small doses only.

The Peruvian Bark will certainly be found serviceable in the course of the cure in case of mortification, but I am inclined to be of opinion that it ought not to be directed till suppuration has come on.

Before I conclude, I beg to apologise for any incorrectness of language which may have escaped me in writing the preceding narrative.—My time being so much occupied by constant attention to the duties of a fatiguing profession will plead my excuse with the liberal reader, and defend me from the severity of criticism. The subject requires rather to be written intelligibly than finely, and if I have succeeded in that particular, the public, I flatter myself, will consider all other inaccuracies as pardonable.

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